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THRELFALL'S METHOD OF FIXING SECTIONS.—Mr. Threlfall has discovered a method for fixing sections on the slide which will be found superior to that of Frenzel, described in the July number of this journal.

"A thin solution of caoutchouc in benzine or chloroform is prepared and poured over the slide so as to form a film in the same way that collodium is poured on a photographic plate. When the film is dry the sections are arranged on it, and the temperature of the slide raised to the melting point of paraffine; the sections then fall on to the India rubber film which has become sufficiently sticky to adhere to them perfectly. *When the slide is cold* it is treated with naphtha or any light paraffine oil, the solvent action being more rapid the lower the boiling point of the oil used.

Absolute alcohol is readily miscible with the naphtha or light paraffine, so that the solvent is readily removed. The slide can now be placed in successive alcohols, stained and returned to absolute alcohol. It is now to be cleared with creosote or oil of cloves and mounted in the ordinary way. Apart from the great advantage of being able to stain on the slide, this India rubber method seems to possess some points of superiority over the shellac method of Giesbrecht, *Zool. Anzeiger*, 1881. This depends on the fact that *sections can be mounted in balsam direct from the naphtha*.—*Zool. Anzeiger*, No. 140, p. 300, 1883.

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### SCIENTIFIC NEWS.

— Baron Nordenskjöld's expedition to Greenland started last week in the *Sofia*, under the command of Captain Nilsson, and a crew of thirteen hands. Baron Nordenskjöld is accompanied by Dr. Nathorst, geologist; Dr. Berlin, surgeon and botanist; Dr. Forsstrand, zoölogist; Dr. Hamberg, hydrographer; two Laplanders, two Norwegian ice-masters, one harpooner, and Herr Kolthoff as assistant zoölogist, with Herr Kjellström as typographer and photographer. The *Sofia* carries provisions sufficient for a sojourn of fourteen months on the inland ice, assuming that the interior of Greenland is covered by ice. The *Sofia* had as passengers to Iceland Count Stromfeldt, Dr. Arpi, and Herr Flink, who intend staying in the island for some time for the purposes of study and collecting.

— M. Fredericq, of Liege, says the *English Mechanic*, lately put several aquatic coleoptera (including the great water beetle) in aqueous solutions of curare and strychnine in poisonous quantity. A few drops of these liquors sufficed to poison a frog in a few minutes. The insects, however, lived in them, some more than a fortnight, others nearly a month (when the experiment was concluded). These Coleoptera are certainly sensible to the action of curare and strychnine, and the absence of symptoms of poison-

ing in the present case must be (the author says) because the absorption by the surface of the body and the mouth was *nil*. M. Plateau has previously observed that aquatic Coleoptera kept in sea water do not absorb its salts.

— The first Walker prize for 1883 was awarded to Howard Ayres, of Harvard University, for an essay on the embryology of *Ecanthus niveus*, the tree cricket. It will be seen in our advertising pages that besides the regular Walker prize, the Boston Society of Natural History, through the generosity of a member, also offers a first prize of from \$60 to \$100 and a second prize of \$50 on the following subject: A study of the venation of the hind wings of Coleoptera, with illustrations of all the families of Le Conte's and Horn's classification.

— Dr. C. C. Abbott, of Trenton, N. J., has destroyed another old belief in weather lore. For twenty years he has kept a record of the building of their winter houses by the muskrats, the storing of nuts by squirrels, and other habits of the mammals which are commonly regarded as indicating the character of the coming winter. His conclusion is that the habits referred to have no connection with the rigor or mildness of the approaching season.

— It is stated that five perfect human fossils have been discovered in a cavern at the mines of Bully-Grenay, in the north of France. Weapons and utensils of stone and wood were found along with them. The remains have been taken to the towns of Lens and Lille, and invitations sent to the Academy of Sciences and the British Museum soliciting the attendance of some experts.

— The Balfour memorial fund will probably yield an annual income of £300, which it has been agreed shall be applied in endowing a studentship of original research in biology, and in making occasional grants of money in aid of similar investigations, especially in animal morphology.

— By a slip of the pen Professor W. W. Bailey said *circumference*, when he meant *diameter*, in his note on the big spider-web in Franconia. According to Mr. Emerton it was probably that of *Epeira angulata*, which he has seen two feet across.

— Adrian Luis Jean Francisco Sumichrast, an able naturalist and collector, well known to the scientific world, died on the 26th of September, 1882, after a short illness, and in the fifty-fourth year of his age, at Tonala (Chiapas), Mexico.

Professor Sumichrast, although for thirty years a resident of Mexico, to the study of whose natural history and antiquities he devoted much of his attention, was an European by birth, having been born on the 15th of October, 1828, at Ivorne (Canton du Vaud), Switzerland. He was a member of the Société des Sciences Naturelles du Canton du Vaud, of La Sociedad Mexicana

de Geografia y Estadística, of the Société Zoologique de France, of the Entomological Society of Philadelphia, etc., and a valued and active correspondent of the Smithsonian Institution, of the Cambridge Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, and of several other noted scientific institutions.

— Gen. Sir Edward Sabine, K.C.B., F.R.S., and president of the Royal Society of London, died in June. Besides his activity as member of various scientific societies, he will be remembered for his studies of the phenomena of terrestrial magnetism, first undertaken while attached to the Arctic expeditions of Ross and Parry. His other papers on physical science were also numerous.

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## PROCEEDINGS OF SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES.

PHILADELPHIA ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES, Feb. 29.—Miss Lewis spoke of the structure of the barbs of birds' feathers. The portions that are lustrous are composed of angular cells, while the duller parts are formed of globular cells. Professor Cope, while making certain corrections in statements made by Professor Peters, called the attention of the academy to an interesting species of snake from South America, described by the latter naturalist. This species would have to be placed very near to the African genus *Causus*, proving that the *Causus* group, which has fissured fangs, and must be placed among the higher serpents, exist in the new world. Dr. Leidy stated that by careful calculation he had estimated that a female anodonta contained 1,200,000 eggs.

March 8.—Professor Cope gave an account of the Permian reptilian fauna, and described a saurian intermediate between types before identified from that formation under the name of *Chilonyx rapidens*. The reptiles of this epoch all belong to the Theromorphia, and have no affinity to those of Mesozoic times. The batrachia and reptilia also resemble each other more closely than do those of other periods, and both resemble mammals in certain parts of their structure, so that the points of departure of all forms of vertebrate life above fishes appear to exist in the Permian. Professor Heilprin again insisted upon the impossibility of the polar-ice cap attaining any such thickness as some have attributed to it, and observed that if the principles he had enunciated were true, they would apply also to Alpine and other summits, which must rise above the line of greatest precipitation. He cited numerous facts from various observers to prove that such lofty summits have, in fact, a much thinner covering of snow than more moderate elevations, and are in some cases entirely bare. Such an Arctic glacier as was postulated by some would require 25,000 years to move from 65° N. lat. to its terminal moraine, even if it moved at the rate of one foot per day. With the infinitesimal slope it would have, two and a half inches would be a more prob-